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## BIBLIOGRAPHIES, BRIEFS, AND ORAL EXPOSITION IN NORMAL SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup>

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I desire to comment on three phases of co-operative training in English which are possible in normal schools, namely, (1) training in the use of books and libraries, that is, systematic bibliographical work, (2) training in the organization of material in the form of expository briefs, and (3) training in oral exposition.

The possibilities of this type of co-operative English work are probably greater in a normal school which emphasizes two-year courses for high-school graduates than in any other educational institution above the elementary school. These large possibilities are due to the fact that such a normal school theoretically should be, and often is, more unified in its organization than other institutions. This greater unification results from several factors which include (1) the very definite professional aim, namely, training teachers for elementary schools, (2) the relatively brief period for doing this. The combination of these factors results in a very rigid selection of those courses of instruction which are essential and the definite elimination of those courses which do not have a large applied value. Hence in a given department, few courses will be offered, and these will soon become definitely standardized. When this standardization is once effected, the attention of the department is no longer concentrated on the selection of its subject-matter, but upon the most effective teaching of the subject to the normal-school students. This effective teaching may very well include the three forms of co-operative English work mentioned above, namely, training in systematic bibliographical work, in writing expository briefs, and in oral exposition, and this work may be required uniformly throughout the institution in all departments.

<sup>1</sup> A paper presented before the National Council of English Teachers, Chicago, November 29, 1912.

These forms of activity are of vital importance in the effective teaching of every subject; they are as important in history, geography, and nature-study as they are in English. In this respect they differ from some of the more formal aspects of English work, such as correct spelling, correct forms of speech, sentence structure, etc., in which the instructor who is not a specialist in English is often not interested and of which he is commonly not competent to judge. I shall take up briefly each of the forms of co-operative work for special consideration.

The necessity of training in systematic bibliographical work is easily demonstrated. Many school buildings are being provided with selected libraries; special library collections for children are provided in many cities; supplementary reading by children is growing in all subjects; and the teacher is expected to be constantly developing a body of supplementary subject-matter and informing herself concerning the larger aspects of the topics she is teaching. The difficulties encountered by teachers in connection with some of these new demands are illustrated in connection with the making of lesson plans in practice teaching, especially in the content subjects. Student teachers are commonly not considered competent to teach any topics except those of which they have had an intensive treatment in departmental courses. Yet very few of the topics they will have to teach in actual school work are covered in these courses. One practice teacher was referred to a departmental head for assistance on a topic which had not been covered in the course. He referred her to a dozen or more large volumes. She worked on them twenty-five hours and came back with the report that there was nothing in them on the topic. This waste of time was partly the fault of the instructor, partly of the system for not providing bibliographical training, and partly the fault of the student.

I was in a Junior class in history in college in which the instructor assigned us individual topics to work up for reports. He said, "Your first step will be to prepare a bibliography." Half of the class had never heard of a bibliography and had never done any systematic reference work.

Training along this line should provide for the following:

(a) a short course (from five to ten lessons) by an expert, on the use of standard reference systems and bibliographical aids; (b) frequent assignments in all departments of topics to be worked up; (c) the requirement of a representative or fairly complete bibliography as the first step in working a topic; (d) this bibliography should include not merely exact references, but also a brief description of each reference based on a cursory examination of it.

The second phase of co-operative English work, namely, the preparation of expository briefs, might well take the place of much of the writing of long term papers and other papers which is often required. There is entirely too much of the writing (or often copying) of long papers made up of undigested, unorganized ideas. There is entirely too little of the careful, thoughtful organization of ideas derived from a variety of sources, and of the concise expression of these ideas freed from the lumber of unnecessary words. One remedy is to be found in the requirement that many reports should be put in the form of expository briefs.

By an expository brief I mean the presentation of material in the form of clear, concise, complete statements or sentences, so subdivided, paragraphed, and numbered as to indicate clearly the relative value and subordination of the various points. Hence it differs from the ordinary outline or ordinary summary. This difference must be elaborated to students but need not be here.

The advantages of this type of writing for the student are obvious. It is a mechanical device which practically forces him to attend to the number, relation, and organization of his ideas. In the ordinary long paper these factors do not stand out clearly. The training in concise, exact expression that results is also important.

From the standpoint of the instructor for whom the paper is written the use of the brief is a great time-saver. He can read it in much shorter time and can more easily estimate just what the student has accomplished.

Not only term papers, but also notes on readings can be put in this form to advantage. In one of my undergraduate classes I require students to read periodical articles on the teaching of

special subjects and to report on them in the form of briefs. I can read thirty of these, representing three hundred pages of periodical reading, in two hours. I usually make note of such references and items as interest me. The advantage to the instructor is obvious in this case. Lesson plans put up in the form of briefs make the student much more conscious of the problems of subject-matter and method which confront him in his teaching. Moreover, the plans may be much more quickly read by the critic teacher.

The preliminary training in the making of briefs should be provided in the department of English, and a uniform style established which should prevail in all departments.

The third phase of co-operative work in English, namely, training in oral exposition, is intimately related to the other two, for the oral reports on topics which might be required in all subjects should be preceded by systematic bibliographical work and careful organization of the reports in the form of written briefs.

The great value for teachers of training in systematic, artistic oral exposition is shown in the high grade of this type of work in the schools of Germany. We are not likely to carry exposition by the teacher to the extreme to which it is carried in Germany, but it deserves to play a considerable part in our instruction as supplementary to textbooks and to development lessons. Many of our teachers are especially deficient in oral exposition. They have no standards of excellence and no skill. They may be somewhat skilled in oral narration, but the rambling, hodge-podge, unorganized character of their expository oral discourses is often appalling. Even the experienced teachers whom we find as graduate students in our departments of education are often lamentably weak along this line. Their class reports have been characterized by one instructor as "unmitigated bores."

Again, the remedy is preliminary training in the English department, supplemented by regular oral reports in all other departments. These reports may vary from three minutes to a half-hour in length, and a definite technique of giving them should be developed. This should include very definite and clear assignments by the teacher followed by the bibliographies and briefs

prepared by the students as described above. In making a short oral report the student should not have any notes in his hand, but his brief or some of its more important points should be written on the board. An immature student in the normal school, before presenting his first long oral report to the class, might be required to rehearse it before a committee of two or three students from the class, and the instructor. This provides the necessary audience, breaks the performer in gradually, and saves the time of the class if the report is found to be unsatisfactory for presentation.

From the standpoint of the special department, this method of reporting is, in my estimation, a useful device for freeing individual reports from some of the objections that have been urged against them. From the standpoint of training in expression it provides the first essential, namely, an audience-situation, that is, the pupil with something to say and the group for whom it will be significant.

I first became acquainted with this type of co-operative English work in a high school which I attended. The principal was a teacher of English and provided for this much co-operative work throughout the departments. For purely departmental purposes I have used it in the department of education with all grades of students from those of the normal school to candidates for the Doctor's degree, and I am convinced that it has contributed to the efficiency and interest of everyone concerned, including the instructor.